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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the steps a teacher should follow in organizing a learning center. Considered are the two types of learning centers (curriculum and skill area centers), skill objectives, and criteria for selecting materials and equipment. (SBH)

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Learning is Fun Through Learning Centers

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Learning is Fun Through Learning Centers

By Nidia Moreno Milne

Learning centers is one approach of individualized instruction which helps meet the educational needs of children. Learning centers are areas which contain a collection of activities and materials to teach, reinforce, and/or enrich a skill or concept (Kaplan, Kaplan, Madsen, and Taylor, 1973).

Learning can be fun through learning centers. It provides the student with an array of multi-media materials and games geared at his instructional level. Developing learning centers can be an enjoyable process if the classroom teacher follows some simple steps.

There are basically two types of learning centers the teacher can develop. The first type is in a curriculum area such as math, science, art, housekeeping, social studies, language, etc. The second type of learning center can be developed into a skill area. This could include role playing, sensory, gross motor, exploratory, and so on. In selecting the type of learning center, the teacher should keep in mind what the children's needs, interests, and skills are after conducting an initial assessment

or screening on mental and physical skills.

At this point, the teacher should make a diagram of her present room arrangement and determine which areas would be more feasible for learning centers. Learning centers can be placed in a multitude of places. They can be in boxes, on shelves, on tables, in a corner, behind the teacher's desk, in a closet, on a window sill, in a large appliance box, etc. The list is endless. Take a good look at your room. What areas can serve as learning centers?

Consider the type of learning center with the assigned area. For example, a reading center would be very appropriate in a corner or in a quiet area. Consider also the "traffic flow." It is a wise idea to plot the proposed centers on a graph paper.

After deciding the type of learning center to develop, list the skills to be learned in sequential order. For example, in a math learning center at the second grade level, the measurement skills which need to be learned are: measure objects to the nearest inch, half-inch, and centimeter; identify, name the value of and make change for amounts up to $1.00; names the days of the week, dates in a month, months of the year, and current year; identify cups, pints, and quarts. List at least twenty-five skills. Write the skills in behavioral objectives. Nowadays, the skills are usually listed at the beginning of each chapter. If they are not, the teacher can go through the

different chapters and pick out the skills to be taught in sequential order.

For a reading center at the preprimer level, the sequenced word-study skills would include: word meaning and concept building; picture clues; visual descrimination left-to-right progression, word configuration, capital and lower case letter forms; auditory perception-initial consonants (b,c,d,f,g,h, l,m,p,r,s,t,w), rhyming elements; and structured analysis (Hammill and Bartel, 1977).

It is strongly recommended to take an inventory of the materials in the classroom. This list should include audio-visual equipment such as projectors, record players, film-strips, books and materials. This inventory will aid the teacher in seeing what materials she has on hand and what she needs.

Now that the teacher knows what she/he has on hand, materials both teacher-made and commercial-made can be correlated to the objectives. Brophy, Good, and Nedlar (1975) suggest the instructional materials should have the following characteristics: interesting, enjoyable, safe, sturdy, durable, flexible, invite active manipulating, provide self-correction and useful.

Spodek (1972) recommends the following criteria for selecting materials and equipment:

1. Cost - the cost an item has to be balanced with the benefits that the item can provide in the school program,
2. Relationship to the school program-select materials and

equipment that will be interesting to children and help further their educational goals,

3. Quality and durability,
4. Flexibility of use-consider equipment which can be used in a variety of ways and situations.

In developing teacher-made materials for the learning centers, develop activities which the auditory learner can listen to, the visual learner can see, and the kinesthetic can manipulate. Develop activities ranging from simple to difficult, attractive looking, and multimedia.

In looking over the activities which correlate to the different objectives, ask yourself-

Have I included things the children can see (filmstrips, films), can hear (tapes, records), can do (write, draw), and can make (cutting pictures and pasting)?

The above types of activities give the children options to learn. A list of suggested equipment for the centers in included in Appendix I.

Task cards provide the student with the necessary instructions to carry out the various learning activities (Charles, 1976). The teacher can use 5 X 7 cards. On the task card, the objective should be stated at the top. The corresponding activity should include easy to read directions. A center symbol should be included at the top of the task card. This symbol can be something the children have identified as appro-

priate for the centers. The symbol should correspond to the box, shelve, or area where the materials are kept.

As far as scheduling is concerned, the teacher has several options. It can be teacher control, timed, on a rotation basis, self-paced, or task completion.

Record keeping can be handled through daily logs or weekly logs, anecdotal records, checklists, parent conferences, and so on.

In summary, learning is fun through learning centers. Students can choose from a variety of activities to learn or reinforce new skills. Grant it, learning centers take time to develop but the options and learning opportunities offered the students are worth it. And now to the next learning center.....

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Appendix I

The following is a list of suggested equipment for different centers:

Housekeeping Center
broom
mop
pail
dress-up clothes
doll house
pots and pans
dinnerware
glassware
flatware

Music Center
piano
drum
maracas
tambourine
records
record player
taperecorder
guitar
xylophone

Nature Center
water
clay
work bench
sand
mud
wood
shells
shovel
pail

Carpenter's Center
hammer
screws
bolts
nuts
washers
wrench
paste
work bench

Reading Center
bookshelves
area rug
books
records/ rec. player
taperecorder
cushions
rocking chair

Math Center
ruler
tape measure
cups, pints, quarts
colored beads
clock
scale
play money
box of scrap materials
box of bells
button box
marbles

Manipulative Play Center
puzzles
parquetry blocks and pegboards
constructive materials Lego
science materials
Montesorri didactic materials
sand
water